

Fire and Ice(packs) by Ludovico_is_my_homeboy

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Summary:

"Billy glares at the dark woods like it has personally offended him. In a way it has. It has swallowed up something precious to him. He has every intention of getting it back."

After their unfortunate tussle, Billy and Steve struggle with nightmares. Billy tries to come to terms with his fears and pines like a tree over an endearingly oblivious pretty boy.

1. Darkly Dreaming

Summary for the Chapter:

The nightmare(s)

In his dreams (nightmares), Steve is never at the Byers' house. You would think (Steve doesn't like to think about it) that that house would be a recurring source of horror for him, the place where his worst fears were first realized.

It was there that the Demogorgon came out of the wall. It was there that the monster, tall and faceless, went up in flames.

But when Steve remembers that first night (he doesn't like to think about it), he remembers Nancy and Jonathan standing with him, next to him, the three of them a solid line. Fear drains away within the memory of two bodies close to his.

In Steve's nightmares (only one nightmare, the same one, over and over), he is in the old junkyard, a graveyard for metal monsters reflecting an eerie gray moonlight through the fog. He stands in an open space, the demodogs surrounding him, pacing.

He is alone.

His bat is flimsy, his arms heavy and weak, he is in the dark and in the open and he is standing without Nancy, without Jonathan, without Dustin, without friends or adults or allies. The things that threaten him are so much bigger, darker, more primal than the comic book villains and schoolyard bullies of his youth. Things nameless, so ancient they are beyond human concepts of good and evil.

He hears voices, but they are frantic and far away... he knows the kids are in the bus, but there are miles between him and them.

The world is an ocean of empty, impossible distance, as profound as a black hole and just as destructive.

Steve can't save them. He can't save himself. It is dark and there is no one out there but Steve and the monsters and the conviction (like a

living thing) that he's not strong enough to stop any of it. Waiting and alone, and knowing what's coming.

Pain and blood and obliteration, the nothingness that exists past the rows and rows and rows of teeth.

He wakes up screaming in an empty house.

Billy doesn't dream. He tries not to dream. He works out, lifts and runs until every muscle aches, flirts and fucks and fights his way through Hawkins, drives his car at speed, music blasting loud to drown out any too-ugly, too self-aware thoughts. He shapes himself into a careening, careless ball of (un)feeling and pretends he isn't stuttering slow, caged, trapped. He tries to wear himself out, to fight sleep so that when sleep comes there are no dreams.

Billy dreams.

In his dreams, at least in the days since *that* night (that night, that night, what the fuck happened?), Billy is in the Byers' house. That weird, broken-looking house. He does not have the same nightmare over and over (not one nightmare but many nightmares but the same nightmare, really, over and over). There are variations.

Often in his dreams he can't move. He is lying on the floor of the Byers' house, pinned (trapped, caged, stuttering slow) under a hurricane, a pounding, punishing, terrible force which breaks bones, which tears skin and makes it bleed.

Sometimes he is under the hurricane... sometimes he is the hurricane, an ungodly, godlike manifestation of rage that Billy cannot control, punishing and breaking a blurred, fragile, faceless beauty laying stretched out beneath him.

Both dreams terrify Billy. He is (he is destroyed by) the raw, overwhelming energy which obliterates all, which hates everything.

There is another dream (nightmare) which is worse, so much worse. It's a dream he's experienced in bits and pieces, in myriad variations since he was small, since before he understood the meaning behind

the name his father had called him (he'd never told his father about the dream, but dad knew, he knew, *he knew*). Before he understood that the word, the name he had been called meant dirty, wrong, twisted, weak. Before he understood that the name and all it meant was inescapable, as much a part of Billy as his own pounding heart.

You little faggot.

Recently the dream has solidified into something else, clearer and crueler.

It's a dream that starts out (worse) gentle, with fingers tangled in thick, soft hair, playfully tugging, full lips jerking up in a warm smirk, large brown eyes that are open, so (holy shit) honest and open. Open, open, pressing open, gently giving, without force (no need for force, no place for the hurricane). All the hidden, hurting, sweet things are laid bare, exposed, but on warm, clean bed sheets and without pain, without judgement.

That dream is worse than any other.

It's worse because it ends with two fingers pressed firmly against Billy's bare (heart) chest, pushing him away. It ends with a cold, decisive, familiar voice.

Get out.

A dismissal. A rejection.

Like Billy, who has always, always been able to coerce compliance out of everyone except the father-monster in his home (in his head), is worse than shit (which he is, he knows he is), is worse than trash.

Like nothing Billy can say or do, like no act of gentleness or violence could possibly change this moment, could possibly touch the young man standing in front of him, his two fingers pressed against Billy's bare (heart) chest.

Like Billy is invisible. Like Billy is nothing.

Billy wakes up from his dream drenched in sweat, cold dread sitting like a rock in his stomach.

Billy does not wake up screaming. He learned a long time ago not to do that.

2. Two Kings

Summary for the Chapter:

The apology

There is an apology (of sorts).

Steve is in the school parking lot, unlocking his car, half considering the route he will take to shuttle Dustin and Lucas to Chick's Pizza tonight.

The school day is over – now it's time for homework, sleeplessness, and the half-babysitting, half-chauffeur, half... um... whatever, whatever, shared trauma bullshit den-mother stuff that now takes up most of his time and thought.

No basketball today. Steve's been temporarily benched, and between his face (thanks, Billy) and the persistent nightmare-driven sleep deprivation which has left him shaky and distracted (thanks, weird tunnel world) he can understand why.

The shocked looks his beaten face had received a few weeks ago had faded with his bruises. He'll have a scar running down the side of his forehead just above his hairline (that was probably the punch that pushed him into unconsciousness...or was it the fucking plate?) and maybe a small one on his lip but otherwise everything had healed well.

Maybe that was his superpower, like in the nerd brigade's dragon game – the pretty face is eternal.

Steve's eyes flick up to see Jonathan and Nancy walking away on the other side of the lot, their heads bent towards each other in conversation. He considers, briefly, the 'old' douche-bag version of himself and is glad in a wry way that 'asshole Steve' is long gone. He had a way of sucking all the oxygen out of the room until even Steve himself felt short of breath.

"Harrington," a voice calls out... close, too close for comfort...

In Steve's nightmares it's always the demodogs who are the threat, always the monster from the woods, the figure from weird fiction. But if he thought about it (he doesn't like to think about it), he'd remember that he'd felt that same lonely helplessness that haunts his dreams at another point in his life... when he was stretched out on the floor getting his scars from Billy Hargrove.

Billy is a respectful few feet away, leaning with one hand on the hood of Steve's car, the other in his pockets, every inch of him cocky-casual. It's fucking December but the other boy's jacket is still open, and he seems to be making a valiant effort not to shiver.

He's got a healing split lip... must have been in a fight with someone. Someone else. Who knows with Billy?

Steve, he is proud to say, mimics Billy's casual stance, though underneath he is a perfect balance of fight-or-flight readiness.

"What is it, Hargrove?" Steve's voice is steady, almost cool. He's faced worse, but not much.

Billy, for his part, understands Steve's posture and tone perfectly. Fuck knows he's performed this bullshit act himself often enough - the thin veneer of calm over the animal wariness, facing down a much stronger foe.

And although this is not the first time that Billy has inflicted pain on others and witnessed the barely-contained tension which results, it is one of the few times he has genuinely felt like a monstrous asshole about it.

"Relax, pretty boy. I'm not going to eat you."

The jibe falls flat. Billy tries again.

"Your face looks good." *Jesus, Hargrove, what the fuck?* "I mean, better."

Steve's incredulous look mirrors Billy's own growing self-disgust. Billy knows that he's already fucked this up beyond repair (he did that weeks ago at the Byers', probably even before that), but apparently Billy's mouth won't be satisfied until he's burned the

whole shit-show to the ground.

“You want something, Hargrove?” It takes everything Steve has in him to force the words out in a semi-steady voice.

“Just,” *those liquid-brown eyes. Christ, pull it back.* “I’m sorry.”

Steve blinks at him. “What?” He genuinely sounds confused.

“I said I’m sorry. For. You know.”

Billy falls silent.

Steve narrows his eyes. “Not sure I do, Billy. And I’m not sure why you’re saying this to me now.”

Read: Why are you saying this to me *now*, weeks after the fact, when the bruises are all but faded and when I’m trying so hard to move away from you?

Billy gets it. Sure. The rejection stings, but he covers it with a shrug and a half-lie.

“Max. Apparently apologizing is the only way I could get her to talk to me again.”

“Didn’t think you’d care about that.” Steve’s heard a few things about Billy and Max’s relationship since that night at the Byers’s house, and almost none of them good. At least Billy’s laid off a bit since then, if what Max says is true.

“I don’t. Most peace and quiet I’ve had in months.”

“Then why...?”

“‘Cuz even my asshole father is starting to pick up on the tension, okay? I don’t need that shit.”

Just mentioning Neil in passing is enough to rile Billy, to cast long, ugly shadows in his psyche. He pulls out his smokes, shakes a cigarette loose with more force than necessary, and lights up.

“Okay,” Steve says quietly, watching him.

There is a long pause. As it stretches out Steve thinks Billy might be plotting violence, retaliation for some imagined slight, for some hurt which Steve doesn't have the capacity to understand.

Billy isn't doing that, though.

Instead, Billy is trying to figure out how someone he barely knows can mix him up so much.

It was an epiphany. I feel like I've only just woken up. I had to try today. Today I woke up and I had to try to explain, to reach you.

I'm sorry, Billy thinks.

I'm sorry I almost killed you. It was like a dream (nightmare) and I don't remember all of it, but afterwards I woke up alone on the floor in that creepy, broken house and the moment I did I was so sorry, so scared, so sorry.

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry I hurt you.

I'm sorry you flinch away from me in the hallways now...it's subtle and you try to hide it, you're beautiful and strong, but I still see you flinch and you shouldn't have to, and it kills me that you flinch away from me.

I'm sorry you got benched in basketball, that I took that away from you when all you've ever done is take my shit and try so hard.

I'm sorry you won't meet my eyes anymore. I'm sorry I don't hear you laugh in class like you used to. I'm sorry you look so tired now.

I didn't mean to, I didn't, I didn't want it to go this far...but it has.

I used to dream about you, you know? Nice dreams, secret dreams, hot-and-heavy dreams, dreams of some-place-not-here. And I got scared.

I'm sorry I didn't realize how special you were until I fucked it up so badly I can't even...and I can't even say that, I can't even think that, you'll be tainted by me and I'll be burned and we'll both go under if I do.

It's my fault, it's my fault, it's my fault.

Respect, Billy. And responsibility.

"I'm sorry," Billy grinds out, finally. He takes a deep breath. "I'm..."
I'm so fucked "...an asshole."

Steve stares. Billy is reminded sharply of his first days in Hawkins High, how Steve never really spoke to Billy, just watched him out of the corner of his eye and tried to move around him, like his mind and heart were so far beyond the petty teenage struggles that Billy represented. Just a minor roadblock, something low to the ground that Steve was already looking past. Through.

Like Billy was invisible.

Billy can't stand it.

"Well?"

Steve blinks. "Well what?" Billy feels the needles start to dance under his skin.

"Well, you gonna stand there ogling me like a fucking guppy or are you going to say something?"

"Oh. Okay. Well." Steve pauses, licks his lips. Billy is mesmerized in spite of himself. "Well, you're right. You are a total asshole. I'm not going to apologize, so..."

Of course not. Anger boils up in Billy, zero to sixty in less than a second.

It's familiar, almost too easy to be swept up by it. He thinks he might hate Harrington, might want to kill him. He ruins everything, wrong-foots Billy in all the worst ways. That calm fucking indifference. Billy has never been indifferent about anything in his whole goddamn life.

And really, this whole situation is all Steve's fault.

To Billy's credit he crushes that old rage down within himself, covering the twitch in his mouth and fingers by pulling a long drag

from his cigarette.

“I mean, you attacked me...” Steve starts.

“You lied to me. About my step-sister. A fucking child, you creepy weirdo. And you threw the first punch.”

“No...no. You knocked me to the ground and then tried to smack around a kid. The person you should be saying sorry to, by the way.”

Billy isn't even entirely sure who he's mad at. Or if he is actually mad at all. Fucking Harrington, too beautiful to deny, and never smart enough to keep up.

“Who, Sinclair? I already apologized to the twerp. I wasn't gonna hurt him. Not until the little fucker kneed me in the balls.”

Steve snorts involuntarily and Billy can't help the upward twitch at the corner of his mouth. It would help if the brawl that night had been a clean fight between equals, and then both teams shake hands after.

Billy had, in fact, apologized to Sinclair a week ago, grudgingly and without any obvious sincerity, and had extended a blanket 'sorry' to the whole groups of nerds as they huddled together in front of the arcade. Max had refused to go home until Billy had done so. Neil's threats (promises) of consequences should Billy fail to deliver Max home at an appropriate time still echoing in his ears, Billy had capitulated, deciding that this small loss of pride was worth it if he could avoid arriving late for an ever-horrendous Hargrove family dinner.

The party had looked up at him, naked fear barely concealed behind a childish bravado. They were so short. Vulnerable. *Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?*

Billy remembers the shaking, thin arms he had wrapped his own hands around when he pushed that kid against the wall that night, the way Sinclair had tucked his chin in and curled in on himself to protect himself from Billy.

He remembers Max and her friends screaming behind him.

He remembers Steve's eyes closing as his fists (the hurricane) pounded down, punishing the young man whom Billy has wanted (as an enemy, as a friend, as a lover, as anything, as everything) for months now.

Billy feels sick inside.

But the laugh, the little laugh, the involuntary laugh Harrington gives to him. That feels like forgiveness. Like the start of forgiveness.

Billy is a street fighter, a brawler, a survivor. One chink in the armor, a single fleeting opening is all he needs.

And Steve is so easy to needle.

Fuck it. Billy grins.

"Of course, if I'd been dealing with whatever that monster dog thing was I found in the Byers' fridge after I woke up, I'd have been a little on-edge too..."

3. Fairytale

Summary for the Chapter:

The Story

Steve feels like he's been dropped into the underground tunnels again. He's cold and it's difficult to breathe.

"What?" he croaks in disbelief.

His shocked face fills Billy with an ugly glee – it's almost worth the sleepless nights he's lain awake trying to figure out what the hell he saw that night at the Byers'.

He hadn't planned to do it this way, hasn't thought this through... but Billy needs some answers. More importantly, he would like some confirmation that he had in fact seen what he had seen stuffed haphazardly into the tiny, ancient fridge.

Right up until this very moment he had wondered, he had questioned, and he hadn't enjoyed the uncertainty, the haunting thought that he was going insane.

The look on Steve's face clinches it.

He can see the other boy's gaze, softened by Billy's earlier accidental humor, turn cold, can see him scrambling, desperately trying to evaluate the situation, getting defensive.

It's a look Billy's seen before (*I don't know what you don't understand about what I just said...*), and it doesn't fool him for a minute.

He can see he's going to need to threaten Steve a little to ensure compliance, and he adds that element of menace to his stance and his tone. He doesn't like to do it, but this whole thing is too important to let go... it's the real reason he approached Steve in the first place (he didn't do it for forgiveness, though he wants it, he wants Steve's forgiveness so much (and when Steve hadn't immediately responded to Billy's apology Billy had been nearly crippled by how much it hurt), but that's not why he's here... he knows there is no forgiveness

for what he has done).

"I saw it, Harrington. I saw that thing, that freak with the teeth. I know."

"You don't know shit!" The words are out before Steve can stop them and his face is instantly awash with regret. He wraps his arms around himself to self-comfort, tries to come off as aggressively casual and fails.

When Steve doesn't speak up again, Billy sucks in a long breath and lets himself grow taller and bigger, lets his shark-smile spread across his face, lets his fingers lift the burning end of his cigarette up so that it hovers between them like a deadly species of firefly.

He takes a step forward.

Billy hates Steve's flinch, hates that he has to fight for the other boy's (heart) trust this way, through the threat (promise) of relentless violence if Billy isn't sufficiently satisfied (but on another level he doesn't hate it... this is familiar, completely Billy, the tried and true way (and it comes with that glorious rush of *power*, the ability to force, to bend and shape Steve as he likes (the feeling slick and oily curling around his insides, covering everything, making him strong, making him *other*, making him *more* (and it's so comfortable and *easy* to live as a monster within the hurricane...))), and he hates that he doesn't hate it like he should).

He pins Harrington down with his stare and the endless unpleasant possibilities it offers until the other boy crumbles.

It feels like an echo of their fight.

Steve crumbles.

Steve sees in Billy Hargrove's eyes viciousness and government agents and rows of teeth and black oblivion, the end of all his carefully cultivated calm, and suddenly all the air is completely gone from his lungs. He slides down onto the freezing pavement of the Hawkins High parking lot.

Am I fainting? Fuck, I need help, he thinks as he falls.

His knees barely hit the ground before he is lifted up again, long fingers strong as steel on his arms.

“Oh no.”

Does he say that, or does Billy? Doesn't matter.

“Relax, pretty boy.” That's Billy, Steve thinks dumbly. Billy's voice. Those metal fingers find their way under his chin and tilt his head up to meet piercing blue eyes.

“It's all going to be fine, Harrington. So long as you tell me everything I want to know.”

Steve doesn't feel like everything is going to be fine. There's a solid body dangerously close to his and it doesn't comfort him at all.

In the quiet pause, both boys waiting for the other to speak, Billy is forced to admit to himself that this... this right here... is probably not how apologies work.

And then, without thinking at all (because what good has thinking ever done him?), Steve takes a deep breath and surprises them both with a tumbling waterfall of words.

Time ticks by as Steve spins Billy a story. They've moved the conversation into Steve's car, Steve in the driver's seat, Billy next to him blowing cigarette smoke (he lights up one after another after another) out of a crack in the window (“Please, I'm trying to quit,” Steve says). Billy is just glad to avoid the winter chill, while Steve is muttering about the prying eyes of the U.S. Department of Energy for some reason.

Billy has the dim sense that he should be frightened by what he's hearing, by Steve's strange tale of government experiments and secret worlds and Lovecraftian monsters, but he isn't. Instead, he sees his horizons broadening, the landscape around him becoming less cold, less lonely.

Billy feels weirdly free and unafraid now, like something has finally

clicked.

Steve seems to feel something similar (Billy is evaluating Steve as he evaluates Steve's story... this is a new version of Harrington to explore). At least he doesn't think Billy is going to hit him anymore, although he's still jumpy, still upset, still could turn on a dime. He's warmed up a bit as he's gone on, seems to relax more with each moment that Billy 1.) believes him and 2.) doesn't show any signs of jumping out the car and going to... do what, exactly?

Billy can't fathom it, can't imagine who he would rat Steve out to (can't imagine even wanting to do that in the first place...) or how he could throw himself more into the situation Steve's describing... but he does get the impression that Steve Harrington thinks that he, Billy Hargrove, is something of a hothead.

"It's not really something you should get into," Steve concludes.

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah, asshole," when Steve rolls his eyes he commits to the gesture with his whole face, and it makes Billy want to reach out and gently press his mouth to Steve's temple.

"I mean, you saw it, right? You saw what it had for a... a mouth? You think that's something you want to deal with?"

"I dunno. It simplifies things. Explains a lot that needed explaining..."

Steve is incredulous (and he hasn't even told Billy *everything*. He's praying he's hit the right combination of truth and evasion... he's left Eleven out of it completely because he really doesn't want Hopper to murder him and bury his body in the fucking woods).

"That...? That thing *explains* a lot? Man, you don't even know the half of it... we're all pretty much under *government surveillance* for christsakes..."

"Well, here I thought Max was in some sort of cult or in a sex ring or something..."

“You did not!” Steve is frustrated now, almost yelling. “She’s thirteen, she was hanging out with her friends and you knew that! If you didn’t you wouldn’t have shown up at the Byers’! You just decided to make it a... a thing...”

A hurricane, leaving them both exposed and helpless to stop it. Would Billy have killed Steve if Max hadn’t intervened?

Steve shivers. Billy plasters his shark-smile on his face, but his heart clearly isn’t in it. Steve suddenly feels bone-weary. He needs to wrap this up so he can go home and not-sleep.

“They’re called demodogs. They’re monsters from another dimension. You want any more details about what kind of mutant lizard they are and shit, you’ll have to talk to Dustin. Wait, no, scratch that... don’t go near Dustin. I’ll kick your ass if you do. Talk to Chief Hopper.”

The image of Billy trying to file a formal complaint with the Chief is amusing to Steve.

“And you let Maxine go monster hunting?”

“Have you met your sister...? Or any one of those kids? I didn’t *let* them do anything. They just...” Steve waves vaguely. “But I made sure they were safe. Safe-ish. As safe as they could be...”

But you’re not strong/fast/smart enough, Stevie... you’re in the junkyard, surrounded by monsters, alone, pathetic...

“Earth to Harrington?” The smile is gone.

Billy wants (needs) Steve to focus (on him).

Come back to me.

“You’ve got some red, you know?” Steve says, and Billy blinks at the non-sequitur.

“What?”

“Just there...” Steve reaches out but doesn’t touch. During Steve’s story Billy had been chewing his lip and, in the process, the

previously split skin from an earlier domestic altercation (thanks, Neil) reopened and started bleeding again, sluggishly.

Billy feels something like awe, watching as Steve registers and processes the wound and looks up with dark eyes full of something that isn't pity... something dangerously close to understanding.

Pain is clarity. Pain is dark and sweet and familiar...

Too close.

Steve doesn't touch, lets his hand drop onto the car's center console.

Harmless.

Steve sighs and shakes his head. He'll have to pick the kids up from AV soon. There's homework, babysitting, boozing (self-medicating), and another long night ahead of him.

He'll be alone. All night. No parents (they're on vacation, they're always...). No Nancy. No anyone.

He'll close his eyes and the monsters and the darkness will be there again.

When did Billy fucking Hargrove become his problem?

"The kids didn't do anything wrong. We were all just at the wrong place at the right time, I guess. Maybe I shouldn't have lied or whatever...like, I get that. I do. This whole thing is so...fucked. But you're the one who came in and started breaking things..."

You know what happens when you disobey me...

Both boys fall silent. The world outside of Steve's car drifts past almost dreamily, the late afternoon light giving everything a weird glow.

What am I doing? Billy wonders. Where did the rage go? It was there a moment ago (slick and oily, covering everything (the power))... what did I do with it? Or was I always a lovesick faggot? Or is it just that I don't want to be the kind of guy who hurts a guy like Harrington?

"I'm sorry," he says. It sounds so hollow. It's not nearly enough.

"Why did you do it, man? Why, really? You were so..." Steve shakes his head, shudders inwardly at the memory. "Gone."

"I don't have to explain myself to you, *King Steve*. Who the fuck appointed you den mother?"

Zero to sixty with the anger, every time, a reflex. A dark part of him hating (himself) Steve Harrington for being (himself) Steve Harrington.

Bury it, a voice inside Billy's head screams. *Bury that weakness deep inside where not even Monster Hunter Harrington can find it...*

But Steve doesn't take the bait. Instead he rolls his eyes again and turns around to face forward, studying the scene outside of his front windshield.

Panic churns in Billy, feelings of rejection and, with them, that old familiar rage.

Billy loves the sound of a car engine, how the roar rips through the air when you gun it, and the sound of breaking glass when you throw a bottle, fragile and harsh, and the yowling animal cry of wild drunken youth, triumphant when you make a three-point shot in basketball or beat another guy's record doing keg-stands. He loves thrash metal, the dangerous bruising pressure of teeth against skin, the sharp burn of cigarettes and whiskey.

Perhaps on a very fundamental level, Billy appreciates the beauty of destruction. Perhaps the chance to release some of the fury was too good to pass up, and Steve was just a convenient target on that weird, horrible night.

But in trying to push the venom out of himself, Billy just made more of it. He realizes now that he didn't solve anything by hurting Steve. He got Steve's attention (and how!), but he's still trapped, still fading away, still killing himself slowly. The victim of a terrible internal wound, festering.

But how to say that to Steve? How to make Steve understand?

Why do you care? He hates you, you can't have him, why do you care?

"You know...a year ago..." Steve starts, then pauses. Billy looks over at him, but Steve is still looking ahead, collecting his thoughts.

"A year ago... back when I was 'King'... fucking 'King Steve'," Steve says the name so derisively that it's all Billy can do not to flinch, "I used to do things without knowing why I was doing them. Like you, I think. I mean, sometimes it almost made sense at the time... you know that I spray-painted 'Nancy Wheeler's a slut' on the movie marquee when I thought she was cheating on me with Jonathan Byers?"

Billy nods... he had heard something like that from Tommy.

"At the time it felt justified, but then...when I saw Nancy all I wanted to do was take it back. It all spiraled out of control. I hurt her, but it didn't stop there. Before I knew it, I was hurting Jonathan, and Tommy and Carol, and myself."

Steve shakes his head.

"The further it went the more I could see... nothing was what it seemed. I wasn't the wronged victim... I was the asshole. The bully. The monster. And afterwards I couldn't understand why... how I could hurt someone else like that. Someone I loved. For what? For nothing."

Silence fills the car as Billy tries to picture King Steve, a Steve he's never really known, so different from the young man he's watched from afar, the one who always fucks up but who is always fucking *trying*.

Maybe I'd have hated King Steve, Billy thinks. *Maybe.*

"She took you back, though...after?"

Steve nods. "That night I went to apologize to Jonathan and found him and Nancy together. I was... I was about to start the bullshit all over again. But then the Demogorgon came out of the wall and we lit it on fire."

“Which one is that...?”

“The Demogorgon is like a demodog except it stands on two legs and it’s bigger. Way bigger. They were trying to kill it when I showed up. FYI, that’s where the nail bat came from.”

“The one that almost took my nuts off? Yeah, I remember it.”

Steve chuckles. “People keep interrupting monster-hunting thinking something crazy is going on, and then finding out that reality is so much worse.” He pauses again, thinking. “But in a way that stupid monster woke me up. Made me see.”

“Yeah.”

“And when she left me...” Steve swallows. It still hurts. Fuck, why does it still hurt so bad?

“When she left me, it was because I was... I was still pretending things weren’t... what they were. I was still trying to be ‘King Steve’. I was, and I quote, ‘bullshit’. But I’m trying not to be, now.”

“Hmm. Saint Steve,” Billy snarks.

“Fuck off,” Steve snaps. It was a nasty thing for Billy to say but he enjoys the spark that ignites in Steve’s eyes, even if it’s only temporary.

Some fire in you after all...

More silence.

“I thought I might have...” Billy glances out the window, clears his throat. “When I woke up at the Byers’, after Max drugged me with that shit... there wasn’t anyone there. I thought I might have killed you. Or something. Killed everyone, maybe. I don’t know. I was alone. There was so much going on and then when I woke up everybody was gone, my car was gone...and I opened the fridge to get some ice and saw that thing...” Billy barely suppresses a shudder.

“For a moment I thought there had been some sort of fucking apocalypse and I was the last person alive on earth. It was that

quiet.”

More time had passed then either boy had realized, and a wave of kids fresh out of their after-school activities starts to trickle out of the school building.

Soon Steve will drive Lucas and Dustin to get pizza. Soon Billy will drive Max home. Billy and Max are both still grounded for that awful night in November (for the rest of your lives, Neil had said), and the accompanying physical punishment Neil had dished out to Billy with that pronouncement had not made Billy overly eager to test the new boundaries.

His own hurts, unlike Steve’s, were constantly renewed. That is, Billy thinks, at least some kind of answer to Steve’s earlier question.

“I had to get Max. My dad and her mom came home, and she was just... fucking gone out the window, man. I spent all night looking for her.” *And I was scared. I’m always scared, but not usually of monsters with faces which open into rows and rows of teeth. That’s a new one.*

“Okay,” Steve says.

I’m scared now. I’m scared to death of you, and all you are, and all you mean.

None of that matters.

Not an answer, but as close as I can get.

Billy swallows. He’s scared, but he thinks he understands what Steve means about the Demogorgon, because he feels awake, too, and like he can suddenly see the things that were always there, waiting under the surface.

It took a series of underground caves populated by monsters to make Billy feel like he was standing on solid ground.

“Are there any more of those...um...demi...?”

“Fuck, I hope not,” Steve groans.

The school doors swing open and the party walks out. They seem small from here.

Vulnerable, both boys think. *Fragile. Protect.*

Neither of them voice their thoughts. Billy nods, as much to himself as to Steve, and slides out of the car.

“Well, let me know if any show up.”

“Yeah,” Steve murmurs, distracted, before Billy’s final words click.

“Wait...what?”

Notes for the Chapter:

Guys, thank you so, so much for reading and for all the kudos and comments! This is my first fic posted on AO3 and everyone has been so amazingly supportive... you all are lovely sunshine people and absolutely the best! Thank you!

4. Fire and Ice(packs)

Summary for the Chapter:

An Interlude (in a high school restroom (but it's not what it looks like))

“Come on.”

Billy raises his head from where he had half-buried it in his open locker, though it hurts something in his back and chest to do so. It hurts all over, actually, and he’s having trouble telling the difference between serious physical damage and the defeated feeling which seems to have sunk deep into his soul.

He looks over at Harrington, who is filling out a lovely green sweater (shit, when did Billy start liking these *rich boy* clothes? (Answer: When he started seeing them on Steve)) and considering Billy with his own frank gaze.

“Hmmm...Harrington?” He tries to make his voice a sleazy-slick drawl, tries to make Steve uncomfortable so he’ll give Billy that exasperated look and fuck off in a huff, but the words just come out tired.

Last night was bad. So fucking bad.

Last night was the first time in a while, the first time after days, weeks even, of Billy laying low, of Billy thanking Susan for every little thing, of Billy getting Max everywhere on time like he’s some kind of Stasi prison guard.

Of Neil calmly surveying the fucking nightmare home environment he’s created like the asshole god he is.

Billy barely remembered how it had started – the tension, the thunder, the hurricane.

It didn’t matter. It never mattered.

Billy had probably started it himself. His fault, always. He had been

stewing silently, daydreaming about monsters and a mop of dark-brown hair, about throwing up a big middle finger to his dead-end little life, about the endless possibilities of an upside-down world.

He wasn't paying attention and when you don't pay attention you slip up, you slip up and the monsters find you and eat you for breakfast. When you forget to pick up your plate after dinner...

"Come on," Steve says again. He's holding out his hand and for one insane moment Billy thinks Steve wants him to take it. For one insane moment Billy thinks he *should* take it, right here in a hallway full of students milling around, should hold it in his own like you'd hold a girl's.

He comes to his senses almost instantly and keeps his grubby little paws to himself.

"Fucking what, Harrington?" He shuts his locker with more force than necessary (*busy...keep your hands busy...*) and instantly regrets it when the noise sends a throb of pain pulsing through his skull.

"Lunch and free period. Come on, idiot."

Steve places his hand gently on Billy's upper arm and guides him away from his locker.

Any other day, any fucking day before this one, and Billy would have probably flattened Steve like a pancake for ordering him around, for touching him. A defensive response, and one that goes against Billy's personal inclinations, but also one that Billy believes is necessary for his (their) continuing survival in this shit-hole world...

He doesn't strike out, though. Maybe it's shock that short-circuits Billy's instincts, or the image rising in Billy's mind, unbidden, of King-Monster-Killer-Harrington, whom he swears he can see in the shadow of the soft little pretty boy leading him to... the bathroom?

Steve gently maneuvers Billy inside. He makes sure the door is closed, pulls a rubber stopper out of his pocket, and jams it under the door behind them.

"Old trick," Steve shrugs when Billy raises an eyebrow at him.

“Aw, for some alone time with your bitches, Harrington? We gonna make-out now?”

Steve rolls his eyes, but that doesn't make the next words out of his mouth sound any better.

“Lift your shirt up.”

Now Billy really is going to flatten Steve. He's not a...he wants...fuck, he wants...but you don't *do* that, you don't *say* that, he can't *do*...

But Steve is not looking at Billy's shocked face. He's kneeling (*oh God*) ... and taking a bagged lunch and what looks like a container full of ice out of his backpack. He then shoves a soda can and a bottle of aspirin into Billy's hands. Billy takes them from him without thinking, too surprised to put up a fight.

“You know, Hargrove,” Billy holds the soda and aspirin dumbly and watches as Steve dumps the ice into an old gym shirt, “you pretty much just called yourself my bitch just then...”

“Watch it, Harrington,” Billy growls.

“Yeah, figured you're pretty out of it, your comebacks aren't what they usually are...”

“If you wanna go, pretty boy...”

“I don't. Lift your shirt up. Now.”

“What the fuck are you...?”

“Hargrove,” Steve finally looks up at him, his eyes deadly serious. “You've got massive shiner. You've slept through the last two classes and when you walk you look like the Frankenstein monster. Honestly, you're moving so stiff it's making me hurt. So, shut the fuck up, take the fucking painkillers, lift your shirt, and tell me where it hurts so I can put this on it.”

He holds up the gym shirt wrapped around the ice and Billy can see now...

Oh.

He's made him an ice pack.

Steve fucking Harrington has made him an ice pack.

Huh.

"Christ... you're something else, pretty boy."

"And you're a moron. I'm actually kinda amazed you've survived this long."

"You know I usually like to go out for dinner and movie before I get ridden like this, asshole."

"Foreplay, is it?"

"Fuck you," Billy says, but it's more of a reflex than an actual response.

Fuck, why did Steve have to do this today? Any other day Billy could have bantered and fought, would be using his wit and his lewdness to make Steve squirm in frustration and embarrassment. Pushing him away by pulling him in.

But Steve's got that *look*... and fuck, Billy knows it well. He's seen it before. He saw it at the Byers'. Maybe Steve can't fight for shit, but he can make himself a solid brick wall when he wants something.

Billy doesn't want to lift his shirt up. He doesn't want Harrington to see this. If he's not the big bad wolf then what is he? Just hurt and scared. Invisible.

But this doesn't feel like invisibility. His hands are full of soda and aspirin and there's a rubber stopper in the door, keeping it from opening, keeping the world away. Him and Harrington. They're alone, nobody's going to see him but Steve.

Neil isn't here.

Billy still needs to know, though.

"Why?"

Steve's brow furrows. "Why what? I just told you why."

"Why do you care? I fucked you up, Harrington... I almost killed you, why do you care? You should..." *hate me. You should fucking hate me. Everyone else hates me. I hate me.*

Steve looks at Billy for a long moment, and then shrugs. "I don't know. You aren't... I mean, we're not friends, but... and it's not okay, what you did, but I get why you wanted a fight that night, sort of. You apologized. You know about the... everything. And you're hurting. And... I can do this. I can help."

It is in that moment that Billy really understands, in a way he never has before, who Steve Harrington is. That Billy being there and in pain and not an immediate threat is enough for Steve, enough to make him care. And he sees that Steve is in fact defined, every inch of him, by his capacity for care.

It breaks Billy's heart. This stupid, beautiful asshole. If Billy was any kind of man he'd fuck off before the wildfire in him burns Steve to ash.

But Billy can't fight back today. Last night, Billy felt more than helpless...he felt hopeless. There were no windows or doors where he was, just Billy, small and alone, pinned to the floor, and the hurricane raining down hell from above. At least Neil mostly avoided the face and settled for focusing his rage on his torso.

Fucking hooray.

He wants... fuck it. He'll kill Harrington tomorrow, call him a fag and a pussy and push him away and beat his ass into the ground if that's what it takes. Tomorrow, he'll do that.

Today he wants (needs) Steve's hands on him, he wants Steve's pills and his ice pack, and he wants the calm quiet of this temporary sanctuary and the comfort of a warm body next to his, however innocent the circumstances.

Billy clears his throat after a long, long moment. He puts the soda on

one of the sinks and pops open the aspirin bottle.

“Lower back. It’s all over my middle but there’s something in my back that’s...pulling, almost? Go for it, Florence Nightingale.”

Steve huffs a laugh and does just that, walking around and lifting the back of Billy’s shirt up himself. He can’t see all the damage, but he sees enough for his forehead to scrunch up.

Any other day of the week, Harrington, Billy thinks with a certain wry humor. Any other day, us alone in a locked bathroom...you’d be pinned on the ground under me. Begging. Tables turned. I’d either be killing you or fucking you senseless. Fucking A.

No... not killing. Never again.

It would kill me to hurt you again.

“What happened?” Steve asks.

“Got into a fight outside the Gas n’ Gulp.”

Steve cocks his head in a silent question. He feels like a furnace next to Billy, radiating an energy which Billy can’t help but soak up.

“Just some assholes drinking and talking smack. There were more of them than me.”

Steve hums noncommittally, but Billy is confident he sold that. He’s a pro at bullshit.

“Explains why this bruise looks like the bottom of a shoe.”

Motherfucking Neil.

But the painkillers are working and so is the ice, though mostly Billy believes he’s rolling into quiet contentment because of Harrington, Steve fucking Harrington, and the way his fingers are almost agonizingly gentle on his tender skin, the way his eyes burn with the promise of *something else*.

Something different. Just get me out of this dead-end place, this dead-end

life, please. Soon, before I explode or implode.

They lapse into silence again. Billy surreptitiously studies the boy next to him. He seems paler than usual, and this makes those delicious moles stand out, the ones Billy wants to run his fingers and his tongue over.

His skin also contrasts sharply with the dark shadows under his eyes. Has Steve not been sleeping? Maybe he has bad dreams like Billy.

Steve places one of Billy's hands on the ice pack (he touches him gently but firmly, with confidence... (two fingers pressed against his bare (heart) chest...)) to hold it in place while he ducks down just long enough to dig through his bag again, resurface, and shove half a bologna sandwich into Billy's free hand.

"I've got my own lunch, Harrington," Billy snorts.

"Shut the fuck up, Hargrove," Steve says mildly, taking a large bite out of his own half. His cheeks go chipmunk-wide, and Billy feels the corners of his mouth lift in spite of himself.

"Such a fucking mom, man. Where did you even get the ice?"

"Cafeteria." Steve hums around a mouthful of bologna. "Mrs. Kolinski gave me some."

"That old gator?"

"She's *nice* if you're *polite*," Steve sighs.

"Course she is. I'm calling bullshit. Pulled out the King Steve charm offensive?"

Billy almost doesn't notice the minute flinch. He was aiming for a friendly ribbing, but then he remembers the bitterness in Steve's voice when he had referred to himself as 'King'. And there was something about Nancy Wheeler breaking up with him...what was that, again?

Steve has a brittle look these days that Billy doesn't like. Billy wants Steve fiery and focused, like that night at the Byers'. That Steve was

fascinating (kindred) and saw all of Billy's destructive beauty in return.

Billy wants. What does Billy want?

Something.

"Tell me about them again."

Steve's confused face is puppy-like and adorable. "About...?"

"About that...that other world. And the monsters and everything."

Steve is silent for a long moment, focusing his attention on Billy's bruises, evaluating what needs ice and what doesn't. Billy eats his sandwich and watches him.

"Do you...do you not believe me?"

Fuck, Steve sounds so unsure suddenly, almost hurt, and Billy is surprised.

"I mean, I saw that thing in the fridge," Billy says.

"...The demodog."

"Demodog, yeah. Course I believe you." And even if Billy hadn't see the monster, who would make up a story like that?

A liar, that's who... and he's lied to you before. That's why the Wheeler bitch left him. I remember now. Because he's 'bullshit'.

Well, he ain't the only one.

Maybe he's (like me) queer. Maybe, maybe.

"Then why do you want to hear about it again?" Steve asks.

Billy opens his mouth, then snaps it shut again.

Why does he want to hear about it? It's terrifying... monsters in the woods, secret government agents, spiky baseball bats. But even though he had seen the monster in the fridge, there was still

something unreal about it all. Like a fairy tale.

Maybe Steve wasn't the right person to ask...he's gone a bit green, remembering. Not fiery at all. His confidence is gone, he's jittery and afraid and doubting.

Of course, Steve would have seen those things up close, and Billy does suddenly kind of feel like an asshole. Steve had told Billy about the tunnel. He had said that there were moments down in the dirt where he had felt like he was going to be buried alive.

But still...it's something else, something insane, right here in Hawkins. Something that sets Billy's nerve's alight at the sheer *impossibility*, the *potential* of it.

Billy's pretty good at drawing... maybe if Steve described it in more detail he could draw that other-world, that not-this-shithole place, that alternate reality where teenagers are badass heroes and the monsters aren't actually related to you.

He feels bad for asking Steve, but he's been wondering and daydreaming about it (an escape) and there's no one Billy can talk to about this BUT Steve. Max still isn't talking to him, and he has no one else...

Fuck he has no one else...

Steve looks so pale.

"No reason," Billy replies, and chugs the rest of his soda.

5. White Knight

Summary for the Chapter:

Interlude II (the one in the backyard)

Notes for the Chapter:

Just a heads up, there's a little friendly pseudo-stalking (is that a thing?) and a little PTSD in this chapter. I'm still going for gentle angst and comfort, but the boys do have issues so please be forewarned if those kind of things don't tickle your pickle.

Billy isn't following Steve.

He isn't.

But when you're driving around Hawkins it's not like there are loads of places to go. You can only make the loop to the supermarket and back so many times. After a while you start to go cross-eyed with all the fucking cornfields, or cow fields or whatever the fuck.

So, if Billy happens to drive by the school, the park, Harrington's house, Henderson's house, Wheeler's house, the arcade, the diner, the places he knows Steve likes to go... well, those are all normal roads, normal places.

That doesn't mean he's following Steve.

He's *definitely* not following Steve and he *definitely* doesn't mean to doze off parked in his Camaro in front of Harrington's house.

He's lucky Steve's parents are never home... they seem to be gone for days or even weeks at a time. Thank fuck, or they'd probably have called the cops on Billy ages ago... but also what kind of fucking fucks would leave *their son* on his own like this when anyone with eyes could see that he's vulnerable, and beautiful, and falling apart?

And he is, Billy knows he is, Billy can see it even if no one else can.

Billy hasn't been following Steve, but he knows the dark shadows under Steve's eyes have been getting deeper in these past weeks, that Steve is quieter now than he was before that night at the Byers' house.

He knows that Steve stares off at nothing sometimes, and that he makes pained, jerking motions when someone slams a door or yells. When he smiles or laughs (and he does smile and laugh sometimes, he tries, damn him, he tries to make everyone else feel better), the bright joy never quite reaches his eyes.

It's all an act, a mask.

Bullshit, but in a different way.

Steve is good, so good, but he's also suffering.

And so, the problem. Billy doesn't know what's up with Harrington, and he isn't not-following him for purely altruistic reasons (he's only human after all, and a lustful teenage male to boot), but there's something now in Billy – like a little blip in his heartbeat – that ties him to the broken pretty boy and makes him want to figure out what's wrong and beat the crap out of it, fix it, gnaw and claw and work on it until Steve is happy and healthy again.

He doesn't know when all this happened, when he stopped being an asshole and started being mom-of-the-year. Christmas has come and gone, January has slipped into February, and here we are.

Sometimes Billy just likes to see the light on in Steve's living room in the evening.

But Billy isn't following Steve.

He's not a fucking *stalker*.

Nope.

No way.

He doesn't realize he's fallen asleep in front of Steve's house (last night was another bad night, he'd forgotten to thank Susan for dinner and afterwards he was sore and bruised and couldn't find a comfortable position to sleep in) until he snaps awake, instantly alert like someone had just screamed in his ear.

It's dark...what time is it?

The lights are off in Steve's house.

He should probably go home.

Something's wrong.

A streetlight across the road flickers.

A whispered instinct, and almost immediately Billy is climbing out of the car, crossing the street, walking up Steve's driveway. He is outwardly calm, but his insides are electrified. He's learned to trust that instinct after years of living with father-monster Neil, years of hiding himself from himself.

He knows (he IS NOT stalking Steve, dammit) that Steve's bedroom is in the back corner, and he makes a beeline directly for his window, only pausing to scoop up a few bits of gravel from the drive, walking down the side of the house with steely determination.

Finally taking the plunge.

Something's wrong.

He pauses, double checks to make sure nobody is watching him from the street. He picks out a decent sized piece of gravel and brings his hand up to throw it at Harrington's window when he's interrupted by a terrible cry.

He stills instantly, his arm still flung back comically far.

It's them, it's the monsters... oh fuck, it's all REAL!

A fox, it's a fucking fox, foxes sound like human babies sometimes when they scream...

No...

The backdoor of the house is flung open and suddenly Steve is tearing out of his home, stumbling across the patio and coming to a screeching halt next to the Harrington family swimming pool. He's dressed only in pajama bottoms – Billy's heart flip-flops and he's not entirely convinced it's out of shock or fear. Any lustful thoughts Billy might otherwise entertain quickly evaporate, however.

Steve's eyes are open and wide but also glazed, unseeing, terrified. He's pale and covered in a sheen of sweat, making him look almost ethereal in the light of the pool. He's holding his nail-bat and he's swinging it at (nothing) something and he's looking at the water in horror, panting like he's being suffocated, dragging shallow, uneven breaths into his lungs that puff out again like clouds in the freezing cold air.

For a moment all the world is still except for Steve, who is going to pieces, rattling apart like so many loose nuts and bolts.

Then...

"Harrington?"

Billy is startled by his own voice as it breaks through the quiet – he doesn't sound like himself. There's a croak in it that's tap-dancing somewhere between fear and sorrow and horror and concern. He clears his throat and tries again.

"Steve?"

Steve seems to clock Billy's words, but he doesn't come out of whatever hazy dream-state he's in (is he awake? Asleep? Billy doesn't know, can't tell). He just half turns to where Billy is standing a few yards away.

Billy drops the pebbles and shows him his empty palms, takes a slow step forward. He'd rather not get too close to that particular bat if he can help it, but Steve... he looks so fucked up, like he's choking, like he's dying. He's going to freeze out here, half naked, unearthly pale.

Billy wants to help him. He *needs* to help him. These few weeks of

not-stalking have just solidified something Billy already felt, already knew. *Mine*, a small, primal part of Billy whispers.

Even if he's not mine, he's mine.

“Steve,” Billy keeps his tone low, gentle, calm. Everything Steve needs, everything Billy is not.

He speaks softly, voice as rhythmic as rain.

“Hey, baby, you’re safe. The kids are safe. You’re home, Steve. There aren’t any monsters or anything...it’s just...just Har – Billy...just Billy...you’re safe, you’re with me, I’m here, you’re not alone... Steve...”

The pause stretches out as Steve pants, draws in deep lungfuls of cold air and clenches his long fingers around the bat.

“There aren’t any monster dogs out here, Steve. Come back to me, sweetheart. Come back to me.”

Billy prays he’s saying the right things, isn’t fucking this up too badly. They are things he truly means, things he would like to hear someone whisper to him during those long nights when he’s alone in the dark.

After a moment, a tense, seemingly endless moment, Steve’s breathing steadies somewhat. He blinks slowly, eyes adjusting to the darkness, illuminated only by the weird light refracting from the pool and one lone backyard spotlight, shining steadily.

Steve glances around. Billy’s right... there’s nothing there. He slumps down like a puppet whose strings have been cut, and he lowers the bat.

“Demodogs.”

Billy lets out a nervous snort. “What?”

“Not ‘monster dogs’... demodogs...it’s... a... a fucking compound word...”

Fucker. Billy can’t help it...his lips stretch out into a wide, genuine

smile.

“Okay. Sure, baby. Just keep that bat away from my balls and I won’t argue with you.”

Steve is blinking rapidly now and looking around, trying to piece reality together. Billy allows him that time, that space, makes a show of reaching into his pocket and pulling out his smokes, lighting up.

He should probably just be thanking whatever deity protects stupid, attractive teenagers that Harrington isn’t calling him out on the ‘baby’. Billy can’t bring himself to regret saying it, but it doesn’t really matter because Steve doesn’t seem to have noticed.

Rather, when Billy glances up again he sees something like self-loathing on Steve’s face, deep and fierce and brutal. Billy doesn’t really understand where that’s coming from, but he doesn’t like it.

“The fuck you doing in my backyard, anyway?”

Defensive. A cover, Steve’s covering, he’s trying to hide his shame behind belligerence and confusion.

But also... ah. Yeah. The stalking. Dragged into the spotlight, Billy can see with brutal clarity what he already knew - that he has in fact been a fucking creep. He feels an oh-so-familiar pang of guilt which he covers with a shrug.

“Wanted to see if you were home.”

“In my backyard?”

“Heard a noise.”

“Heard a noise and came into my backyard?”

“Yep.”

“You know there are monsters running around and you’re still walking around my backyard in the middle of the night?”

“Well it sounds fucking stupid when you say it like that but... yeah.”

“Why did you want to see if I was home?”

I was going to climb up your tower and rescue you, princess. “Bored. Thought I’d say hi. See if you had any booze in the joint.”

“You checking up on me?”

“It’s for your own good. There are monsters out there, Harrington, and you can’t fight for shit.”

“Fuck off! I can fight... apparently I just need a bat to do it.”

“Whatever man, I’ve seen you fight. Hey, is this thing heated?”

All Billy’s stalking and he didn’t know the Harrington’s had a heated pool. He can see the steam rising off the water now. Huh. Fucking rich people. Come to think of it, though, it’s probably warmer in the water than out, and it is looking rather inviting at the moment.

Steve isn’t answering him, though. He’s looking at the water... no, not at the water. At the woods. At the woods beyond the boundaries of the Harrington’s backyard.

Steve is staring, wide-eyed, into the darkness, peering intently like he’s desperately trying to make some distant shape out. Billy finds himself following Steve’s gaze, but he can’t see anything in the trees.

No monsters. Nothing but the wind in the leaves.

Steve had been chuckling to himself before, enjoying the banter, but Billy can tell Steve’s shaky grin was relief and a sudden lack of adrenaline rather than genuine mirth. Steve’s eyes never stopped checking the perimeter of his yard, and he’s wrapped his arms around himself protectively, bat dangling loosely from one hand.

A blush is creeping up his face and the sickly sheen of sweat covering his body is drying rapidly and he’s shivering violently now.

Embarrassed and terrified. A lonely former keg king.

And you can’t fight for shit.

“I need to...” Steve’s voice is shaking yet full of fanatic conviction, and Billy gets the impression he isn’t taking to him anymore. “I need to... make sure... gotta stay awake.” His stance is so tense that Billy fears he might snap in two. “I can’t let anything happen... again.”

“Again? What do you mean?”

Steve hadn’t told Billy everything. Some things were too hard to share with a functional stranger in the front seat of a BMW.

We killed Barb! It’s all bullshit!

Steve couldn’t let it happen again. He couldn’t go back upstairs and go to sleep (alone, no Nancy, not like that night, their sin, their blindness, and then Barb had...) and pretend there weren’t monsters out there.

He can’t let it happen again.

He can’t stop it from happening again.

He’s suddenly brutally conscious of Billy Hargrove staring at him.

That self-deprecating look hasn’t gone away – if anything the ridiculousness of the situation is deepening the lines on Steve’s forehead. The flush is creeping down his cheeks to his chest and, while Billy is very interested in studying that phenomenon further, Billy can tell that Steve’s current feelings of shame aren’t the shy-sweet kind, but rather the kind that roils and festers, a shadowy reflection of deeper feelings of inadequacy.

He’s been caught out in a nightmare panic attack by the tough guy who’s been giving him shit for months. And he isn’t wearing a shirt.

The thought makes Billy unhappy. First off, he’s not Steve’s enemy... although he accepts that his actions have, historically, not been those of a friend. Regardless, he is not Steve’s enemy ANYMORE, and he would like the chance to prove just how *close* a friend he could be. *Sleazy fucker.*

Second, Steve shouldn’t be embarrassed... Billy doesn’t think him weak. He knows all about nightmares, though he can’t exactly

explain that to Steve without humiliating Steve further and making himself look like a pussy.

So instead Billy gives him a dry look to show Steve he's not convinced by his act, but it must come off harsher than he means because Steve winces and ducks his head down.

Fuck.

How can a boy (man) holding a nail bat look so unsure?

What kind of up-side down world has Billy stumbled in to?

Fuck it.

Fix it, Billy.

“So?”

Steve's head shoots up, defensive. “So?”

“So, you got any fucking booze or what, Harrington? I'm getting old here. And it's fucking cold as shit!”

6. Into the Woods

Summary for the Chapter:

It hits the fan

Notes for the Chapter:

Demodogs, guys! Demodogs and Dustin! Monster madness and gratuitous violence! Woohoo!

“GO, GO, GO! SHIT, SHIT, SHIT SHIT...”

Billy can hear the yelling the minute he kills the Camaro’s engine. He throws open the car door and steps out into the frigid air.

Two voices cut through the darkness... swearing and then something Billy can't make out. There are thin streams of light from several flashlights moving wildly in the distance, illuminating the forest’s branches, showing him exactly where his idiot princess has gotten to. Billy's heart is in his throat.

“HEY?” Billy calls out. “STEVE?!”

He can just make out an incredulous “the fuck?” before an unearthly howl tears through the night in the distance and some huge unknown thing is bursting through the underbrush, racing towards him.

For once Billy had not been (intentionally) following Steve, but was rather running, hiding, hurting in his own lonesome way. The bruises just under his left eye and splattered across his ribs were in their infancy, radiating heat and achy tenderness, and his fingers itched with the caged energy he longed to unleash against the father-monster back home.

But Billy knew he was no more capable of fighting Neil than he was of spontaneously sprouting wings and flying away. It was a hard truth he had come to accept that it wasn’t the pain he hated half so much as the draining fear, the way he was transformed into a weak,

puny ten-year-old again every time that icy rage filled his dad's eyes.

So, Billy had been driving. Just driving, wandering the earth in the old way, the way he had before a forbidden love shaped his path.

He'd lost track of the fields and the woods flying past him when he spotted Steve's Beemer abandoned on the side of the road.

It's dark out, and Billy knows that Steve hates the dark.

Hates the dark, hates the woods, fears the return of claws and teeth.

So, where the fuck is he? Why the fuck is he out here?

He wouldn't come out here if it wasn't a matter of life or...

It's not a demodog that bursts out of the bushes... it's...

"Fucking Henderson?"

Wild eyes under a wild mane of hair, a baby deer caught in the Camaro's headlights. And Billy's the big bad wolf...except there are bigger monsters out in the woods tonight.

"Oh fuck!" Henderson is alarmed by Billy's sudden materialization, stumbles slightly in his stride but recovers quickly. He keeps moving, nearly runs into Billy, bounces off the open car door and slams his body into the Camaro. Gasping, face streaked with sweat and dirt, Dustin looks up at Billy with the kind of spontaneous, ill-advised trust kids often give to adults in extreme situations.

"Shit, start the car! Start the car!"

"What the fuck?!" Nothing else is coming out of the bushes.

"They're here, they're in the woods, they're after us!"

"Where's Steve?!"

"What?"

"WHERE'S STEVE?!"

Billy can see Dustin's brain short-circuit as he spins around. "He was...Steve...? STEVE...!?"

The two of them stare into the darkness in panicked horror as another eldritch wail rises from deep within the woods.

Steve is out there in the dark. Steve hates the dark, and the woods, and being alone.

He's told Billy as much, a few hours after raiding his dad's liquor cabinet, a few minutes before falling asleep drunk on the couch, his head in Billy's lap, Billy valiantly trying to shift his carefully concealed erection away from Steve's unconscious nuzzling.

That had been the first night, the night Billy had found Steve panting and shaking his bat threateningly at his pool. Steve invited him inside the house, and they'd gotten drunk on Steve's absentee father's expensive scotch, and Steve had blessed Billy with the same kind of undeserved trust that the Henderson kid had given him, born of desperate vulnerability.

Billy had tried so hard not to let him down.

Again and again and again, night after night after that very first night, Billy climbed through Steve's unlocked window and carefully kicked the nail bat out of reach under the bed, just in case Steve got any sudden bright ideas.

Sometimes they drank together, drowning together.

Often, they talked, discussed cars and movies and basketball, or their parent's failings, or their own. If Billy's father was a monster then Steve's parents were ghosts, conspicuous by their invisibility.

In the warm cocoon of Steve's bedroom, the pain and humiliation that parents and friends and the outside world could inflict seemed so remote.

Billy even described, in a reckless moment one night, Neil's abuse, caught out mid-lie and shamed by his own busted cheek and Steve's honest, open gaze.

To his amazement, Steve hadn't said anything (Billy had the sense that he already knew about Neil, somehow). He only retrieved a first aid kit, some painkillers, and a glass of water, and cleaned up Billy's face. The room was still and quiet, the kind of quiet Billy always tried to fill with music and screaming, anything to drown out his thoughts.

He couldn't take it. Billy found himself breaking the silence with the story of his mother's death, how it was his fault, how Neil had seen evil in him and had turned against him then and... Steve just listened.

In not speaking Steve said everything that he needed to say.

Steve had thrown away the bloodied, alcohol-soaked cotton balls, pushed Billy's jacket off his shoulders and placed it gently on the floor next to his shoes, and taken a blanket off the bed and wrapped it around Billy and pulled the edges closed. He pushed him down on the bed (on clean sheets, without pain, without judgement) and laid down next to him and asked what his mother had been like.

Like the ocean. She'd been like the ocean, with long blonde hair like Billy's, like the sun, and eyes that sparkled dangerous mischief, all encompassing, unafraid, brightly colored sundresses and brightly painted nails.

She was something sacred in Billy's head. She went to Mass every Sunday and had given him his medal, his miraculous medal which he never took off even though he almost never really prayed (*oh God, mommy, please stop, make him stop, hurts, please, please, hurts, God, mommy, God, stop*) these days.

She knew every word to every song on the radio, and she was friends with every street-corner busker and starving artist in Cali, and she had taught him how to swim and how to make grilled cheese.

She would have loved you, Steve, Billy thinks. She would have seen through all the small-town bullshit you hide behind, and she would have

fallen in love with that big fucking heart of yours, that warm heart that brings others in from the cold and wraps itself around them and protects them.

She would have loved you like I love you.

You're so like her. You're nothing like me.

And even now, lying here on clean, warm bed-sheets in fucking Nowhere, Indiana (next to the boy he wouldn't admit he loved, *he may not even be queer, you don't know, it may never be like that, maybe it never SHOULD be like that...but, but, BUT...but* who loved him, he could feel it, *he could feel it*), he couldn't quite remember, wasn't quite sure if he HAD killed her, or if Neil had, or if it had been some other thing, some cancer, some monster, or some combination of everything building up.

All he knew at that moment was that it was his fault, somehow. His sin, his responsibility, his fault.

But still Steve didn't push him out of bed.

Sometimes when Billy crawled through Steve's window at night (funny how he never came through the front door at night, though he did often enough in the daytime, more and more as the weeks drifted past...), they just slept.

Billy would take off his jacket and his shoes and his belt and crawl up next to Steve, who always wrapped himself tightly in his sheets like a burrito, and lay stretched out on top of the covers ("I run hot, Harrington, relax" – but really Billy didn't trust himself not to reach out and... and he would never hurt Steve (again), never, ever force him... but he didn't trust himself not to reach out and break the unspoken truce and...), and sleep.

If one of them cried out, the other would comfort them.

(The night that Billy told Steve about his mother was the first night Billy had fallen asleep next to Steve, exhausted by his own grief. He woke at dawn to find Steve's hands wrapped around his, his face turned towards him, unconscious and peaceful. That night both boys

slept soundly and neither of them dreamed.)

“What are we going to do? Shit! He was just behind me! Please, we can’t leave him...” Henderson whines desperately. Dustin is afraid of both the woods and the young man standing before him. He should be. One is dangerous...and he isn’t sure what the other is going to do.

Billy barely hears him. Guilt and fear and rage churn within him but he doesn’t have time to sort through his fucking feelings right now.

Billy glares at the dark woods like it has personally offended him. In a way it has. It has swallowed up something precious to him. He has every intention of getting it back.

“Stay in the car, kid. Lock the doors but keep the motor running.”

Billy reaches down and pops the Camaro’s trunk, ignoring Henderson’s answering squawk as he retrieves a slightly rusty tire iron. *Like a fucking white knight...*

He spins and silences Henderson with a glare. The last thing he needs is the squirt running off... *what would Harrington do?*

“I’m counting on you, kid, okay? You’re our getaway driver.”

The kid lets out another squeak but nods, hands Billy his flashlight, and climbs into the driver’s seat of the Camaro. Billy tries to ignore the fact that he just handed the keys to his baby over to a hyperactive dweeb.

Steve isn’t far. His flashlight had fallen and gotten caught up in the bushes and it’s shining up like a beacon, partially illuminating the clearing where Steve is pinned down.

Billy sees them now, the monsters. They're much scarier alive, two of them that he can see, prowling and growling. And his pretty boy in the middle, surrounded, standing tall, grinding his sneaker into the dirt, planting his feet.

One lunges at Steve head on, and for a moment Billy is frozen (he's ten again, trapped under punishing fists, a father-monster, larger than life). He can't breathe. Steve swings and catches the thing in the neck and it goes down with a weak growl. He finishes it off quickly.

Steve, his Steve, is magnificent. How could Billy have ever have thought he couldn't fight?

It's because he wasn't trying to kill you that night, asshole. He was protecting the kids, he was holding back, he didn't want to hurt you...

While Steve is occupied, the other dog leaps forward. Steve just sees it out of the corner of his eye, not quite in time... he swings and misses, but manages to roll, the edge of a long row of teeth just catching his arm, ripping, tearing.

Steve yells.

Billy sees red.

The fucker barrels past Steve and towards him and Billy strikes out with all his rage, nearly decapitating the demodog with his tire iron. It goes down and he hits it again... once... twice... three times for good measure. He can feel hot blood or slime splatter his chest, and he has to fight down the urge to howl with glee.

"Billy?"

Billy looks up at Steve's shocked face. "Harrington," he nods calmly, as if the two of them had just run into each other at the grocery store or in the hallway outside of class.

"What are you...?"

"Look out!"

Another one, hiding in the dark... Billy had no idea it was there. It

comes at them in a rage, a terrible guttural yowl reverberating from behind all those teeth.

Steve spins and rams nails and wood right down the demodog's throat and fuck, the sight is giving Billy an awkward boner (but then again, what about Steve doesn't do that?). It stops dead in it's tracks as Steve twists his wrists and goes down to his knees, weapon firmly lodged in the monster's gullet.

“Shit!”

“Fuck!”

Steve stumbles back up to his feet, eyes wide, and Billy can't help himself... he rushes forward and puts a hand on Steve's side, confirming that he's there, that he's okay.

Both boys glare at the clearing's perimeter, hearts pounding, weapons ready, nerves on fire, ready and waiting for the next thing. Is it fear or exhilaration? Doesn't matter. Either way it's a hell of a drug.

That seems to be the last of the monsters for the moment, however. Panting slightly and nodding to himself, Steve bends over to retrieve his flashlight. As he lifts it and points down, Billy can see the monstrous face, still terrifying in death, illuminated in glorious technicolor.

No wonder Steve has bad dreams.

“They're still out here... I don't know where they came from... Hopper might know, or El?”

Billy doesn't get a chance to ask who El is. Steve pops the flashlight between his teeth so both his hands are free and reaches down to wrench his bat from the demodog's head.

Billy desperately tries to short circuit his brain before it can process and translate that image into something filthy. He almost succeeds.

The bat comes free with an awful squelch and Steve pops the flashlight out of his mouth.

“So...what the fuck?”

“Was just about to ask you the same thing, Harrington.”

Steve looks at Billy blankly for a moment and then grins. “Monster hunting. Must be Tuesday.” His smile fades. “Shit...Dustin...?”

“He’s in the car. He’s safe. I saw your Beemer and pulled over just as the kid was tearing out of the woods.” Billy motions over his shoulder and sure enough Steve can see the headlights through the trees. They weren’t that far away from the road after all, though it is still so easy to get lost in the woods when it’s dark... *those things are everywhere, they could get to anyone...*

“Thank God.” Steve sags in relief and Billy takes in the slump of his shoulders and the blood dripping from his bat and wonders at the strangeness of people like Steve, of People-Who-Care.

“He radioed me,” Steve says. “He was biking home and they came after him. He had to loop around to try to get them off his back. I thought I’d never find him out here.”

Now that the adrenaline has drained out of Steve, Billy can see the old fears and self-doubt creeping back in. The ‘what if I hadn’t found him in time?’ fears. ‘What if I couldn’t have saved him?’

Billy isn’t the only one who sliced open his chest and bared his soul on Steve’s bed in the weeks following that first night by the pool.

He knows now why Steve hates his backyard. He knows what Steve is afraid of. He knows that he is himself at least partially to blame for Steve’s conviction that he’s not strong enough to protect the people he cares about. He knows how important protecting people is to Steve.

His boy is an open book and Billy can see all the unwelcome thoughts flash across his face .

Steve’s lucky, though. He’s lucky Billy won’t stand for that shit.

Billy reaches out and wraps his hand around Steve’s good shoulder. Steve’s glance cuts away but Billy gives him a gentle shake that forces

Steve to meet his gaze. He puts a gentle hand on his cheek to make sure Steve's paying attention, before dropping the hand to his shoulder again.

He's so proud of Steve. There is no other word for it. He's unselfishly, absurdly proud, and he tries to put all of that feeling into his eyes where Steve can see.

He draws him closer, pulls him in and wraps his arms around him (gingerly, trying to avoid both his and Steve's many sore and bleeding areas), tries to push as much of his conviction into Steve as he can, like Steve will somehow see and understand through osmosis.

Steve does see it, and he does understand – or at least he understands that Billy believes in him, even if Steve does not quite believe in himself. He feels warmed inside and out, and when the boys pull away from each other after a long, quiet moment, he smiles at Billy.

Billy huffs, half amused, and lets go of Steve's shoulder.

“Come on, princess.”

Steve doesn't have the energy to object to the nickname as they trudge back to the car together.

7. Upside-down

Summary for the Chapter:

The boys take a leap in the dark

The house is empty. The house is always empty.

Steve pulls into his driveway; Billy's Camaro pulls up right behind him. They've dropped Dustin off at his home and promised to deal with the monster threat tomorrow (there are always more monsters and there's always tomorrow), and without any invitation or discussion the two of them drive back to Steve's empty house.

Who cares what the neighbors think? Billy's bruised, Steve's arm is torn up... they have both survived their respective monsters tonight. Fuck the neighbors.

Steve and Billy are dirty, and sweating, and bloody, and silent, and all the world around them is asleep.

Without a word, both boys exit their cars and walk up the drive, Billy just half a step behind Steve. For all the *plant your feet*, bullying, furious, worldly, wanton bullshit, Billy is always half a step behind Steve.

Steve unlocks his front door and pushes it open, flipping on the hall light as he does so.

He begins to move forward but is stopped by a gentle touch, hesitant yet firm, the touch of a man who thinks he's going to be pushed away but who also doesn't really care anymore.

Steve and Billy stop moving, pause on the threshold between the cold, dark night and the empty house full of possibilities, between the outside and the inside.

In-between, up-side down.

Steve turns and looks at Billy, sees the bruise on his cheek and the streak of dirt in his hair and the beautiful, unreadable *something* in

his eyes. Maybe he should be horrified, offended, surprised – *I don't, I'm not, I've never...How Dare You* – but stranger things have happened in Hawkins, and Steve finds that he isn't, in fact, horrified or offended or even very surprised.

Billy puts his hand on Steve's wrist (two fingers pressed firmly against his (heart) chest, pushing him away...rejecting him), holds it loosely. Almost without thinking (he doesn't like to think about it) he turns Steve's wrist over, lifts it, and presses a kiss to the smooth, thin skin underneath.

Everything in Billy's world is shaped by fear – Billy's fears, and others fearing Billy.

For once, though, he doesn't think about the consequences, doesn't think of Neil, of monsters, of rejection... of the terrible, perfect things that might happen to him if he exposes all the hidden, hurting, sweet parts of himself to another.

He allows himself to just be, to just...what was that Beatles song his mother used to sing? Act naturally.

It's a miracle, a strange thing as wonderful as any toothy flower monster, that when Billy just 'is', without fear or bullshit, he is *good*.

Steve doesn't say anything. He just gazes intently at where their two hands meet, takes in the nearly unbearable tenderness of Billy's kiss, and then when Billy pulls away Steve lifts those (fucking doe eyes) honest, open (holy shit, so OPEN) eyes to meet Billy's blue ones.

Billy has no idea what Steve sees written across his face.

A part of Billy wants, wishes more than anything else in the whole shit-show world, that he was a fundamentally different person. He mourns, as deeply and profoundly as anyone has ever mourned a loss, the person he might have been in another life. A person worthy of Steve.

Billy wants and wants and wants.

Steve watches and waits.

He feels like he's been waiting for years. Watching a sequence of events play out, a sweeping tide enveloping him and everyone around him.

Insecure, afraid, hyper-conscious of his own inadequacies, his own lack of power and control.

Doing things without knowing why. Doing things just because he could.

Watching himself grow into King Steve and then watching it all slip away, watching Nancy slip away, watching Dustin and the kids adapt to a constantly changing environment, watching himself become someone new... someone stronger for being more fragile.

Watching Billy creep forward, a slow collision course, eyes averted... until now, when Billy's eyes are locked onto his and Steve can see all the desperate fear, the unending vulnerability, and the precious flicker of hope, like a candle still miraculously lit and glowing in the middle of a hurricane.

It's the opposite of his nightmares, now. He has a choice. He can change what happens next, he realizes. For once he is strong and smart and important enough, truly, to shape events. In fact, what he does next is kind of make or break.

Steve turns his wrist around and grasps Billy's hand (heart), and pulls him closer.

Closer.

Close to him, inside, pulls him out of the cold and the dark. He isn't alone anymore... neither of them are.

Steve smiles and licks his lips.

Billy's heart shatters.

8. Epilogue: Just hold on loosely (but don't let go)

Summary for the Chapter:

The boys learn to let go

Notes for the Chapter:

Guys!! It's the SMUT!! Finally! SMUT! SMUT! SMUT!
Also angst, tears, a conversation which devolves into
pure marshmallow fluff, and SMUT!
Please be forgiving, it's my first time writing sexy
times, and see updated tags for info.

(One month later)

It occurs to Billy that he is, maybe, kind of shit at sex.

He'd never ever admit that out loud (he is, after all, Billy Hargrove: Sex God), but he's still pretty sure neither he nor Steve should be crying right now.

Some of his own upset is fear and panic. Well... most of it is, actually.

It's Steve's first time taking Billy's cock. Billy knows the first time always hurts but he's determined to be careful, so careful. He had sworn to himself that he would never, ever (intentionally) hurt Steve (again), and he was trying to keep his promise.

They have been together for a month now. 'Together'...whatever the hell that means.

Billy can't kiss Steve in public, he can't hold Steve's hand as they walk down the street, and they can't go to prom together...

But he can climb through Steve's bedroom window at night after Neil's laid into him... and he can talk his shit through with the boy who has become his best friend... and he can lay on warm sheets and

watch Steve wrap his lips around Billy's aching cock... and he can hold Steve as they both fight through their nightmares... and he can eat lunch with him at school as long as they maintain minimum safe distance... and he can help him with his English essays... and...

Billy's been shit-scared half the time, waiting for Neil to find out, waiting for Steve to finally wake up and see Billy for the trash he is.

Waiting to fuck it up.

But he had promised, he had realized he couldn't hurt Steve again, not even if it would have been better or safer to push him away. Does that make him selfish or selfless? Either way, Billy had made a promise, and he was going to keep it tonight.

It's about more than that, though... he wants to make it so good for Steve, to please him, to show him how Billy feels, to show him that he's precious and beautiful and loved. To prove that Billy and Steve are both worth it, worthy of each other. To be the (ONE) one to make Steve happy.

Because, after all, Billy is happy.

Billy is great.

Every day, every moment, has been a gift Billy never expected to receive.

Billy has Steve... he's *here* with *Steve*, and Steve is his super-secret *boyfriend*, and fuck it, if that makes him a fag or a chick he'll fucking *deal with it*, and *fuck Neil* because right now Billy just wants to do this *right*.

He *needs* to do this *right*.

Granted, it's been a while since Billy has had sex with another boy (since California, since that horrible night Neil burst in and...), but he knows what to do. He had insisted on doing this at Steve's house, in Steve's bed, on a night when neither boy had to be anywhere or do anything or go to school the next day. A night without parents or kids or monsters or rules.

Please, please, I want to stay in his bed forever and never leave, I've never been so happy, so ME as I am in this fucking bed...

He was going to take all the time in the world, for Steve's sake and for his own. It's no hardship... Billy loves, oh, how he loves the little noises, the breathy, jagged moans, the shattered look Steve gets when he's right on the edge, when he's kept on the edge, when he's desperate, when he cums, when he's Billy's (*it's safe to shatter, shatter for me, I'll take you apart and put you back together again, always, I promise, I promise...*).

He nearly drowned them both in lube, and Steve had been just this side of insane by the time Billy had removed his fingers, deeming him sufficiently stretched to take the rest. They had done fingering before, they had been building up to this, but still.

Billy had gone slow, painfully slow, almost tentative in his movements. He allowed Steve plenty of time to adjust to the cock breaching him, pausing frequently, drawing in deep breaths, trying to steady himself and curb his own frantic excitement.

When he had finally bottomed out they both stilled for a moment, panting, breathing, blinking at each other.

Billy, for one, couldn't believe where they were, that he's touching Steve, that he's *inside* Steve (*if I shatter am I safe, will you put me back together again?*).

RESPONSIBILITY rests on his shoulders like a dead weight, but that's fine... *I'm in control, it's okay, I'm in control, I won't let anything bad happen...*

Steve, meanwhile, feels something snap into place inside, feels grounded for the first time in god only knows how long (*for the first time in ages I feel like myself, for the first time I know exactly what I'm doing*) and the shock of it, the earth-shattering *rightness* of it is almost more than he can bear.

Billy pulls out slowly, pushes in again, the drag, the friction making them both melt further into each other. They groan as one and Billy feels his head loll forward, his eyes dropping shut. Again, and again,

so deep, so full.

Billy looks down and instantly everything grinds to a halt.

Fuck. No. Please.

“Baby, what...?”

Tears. Billy sees tears. Lines of tears are falling from Steve’s face, onto his pillow, his face is screwed up, his eyes are wet, he’s biting his lower lip...

This is wrong. Is Steve in pain? Is he hurt? *Is Billy hurting him again???*

Or does he hate this? Is he realizing that this isn’t what he wants? That he doesn’t like boys?

That he doesn’t like *Billy*?

“I’m okay, it’s okay, baby, it’s okay,” Steve is saying it like a mantra and it takes a minute for the words to break through Billy’s panicked haze. He isn’t sure if Steve is trying to convince himself or Billy... everything is a mess, everything’s been turned up-side down, and Billy isn’t sure of anything anymore.

Billy reaches down and brushes his sweetheart’s cheeks, holds his face, eyes flicking frantically, searching for any sign of distress.

“I’m not hurt. You didn’t hurt me, Billy, I’m okay. It’s not that, it’s okay.”

“I... Steve, I...” Billy’s voice cracks.

“It’s just a lot...it’s...a bit overwhelming, but I’m so... I’m great.”

Steve is trying to keep his voice steady and failing. He sounds strained, croaky, (*scared*, Billy thinks. *stressed. in pain.*), out of breath.

He shakes his head and tries to pull Billy back, tries to anchor him.

"I'm great. Billy, I'm okay. If you say you're sorry I'm going to fucking kill you. Please don't stop!"

Too late, too late. Billy's vision blurs. The fucking floodgates are opening. *Fuck.*

"Billy, sweetheart..."

Arms are reaching up and wrapping themselves around Billy's shoulders and bringing him down close.

He's still buried deep inside Steve and he should pull away but he can't and *I don't fucking deserve this, I don't deserve to be safe and warm inside Steve's body, I've fucked it up, I've ruined it*, and he's squeezing his eyes shut against the tears and he can't fucking talk, he can't do this, can't do this, can't...

Billy's face is buried against Steve's neck. He can smell sweat and Faberge Organics. His breaths are coming in ugly gasping sobs, and he's shaking.

Too much.

It feels like fear, like a strange kind of fear, but Billy can't really make sense of it. Neil isn't here, there are no demodogs... it's just Billy and Steve... and Billy isn't afraid of Steve (is he?), he shouldn't be afraid of this (of being *together*). There's nothing to be afraid of (is there?).

I'm the monster.

It feels like ages before he can process anything besides the thud of his own pounding heart.

Good job, Casanova. Way to fucking kill the mood.

He tries, finally, to collect himself and pull away, although he doesn't know how he can face Steve, or himself, after this pathetic display...

"No," the voice, like the embrace, is gentle, protective, and firm.

There is no fighting it.

“No.”

Billy finds himself stilling, holding his breath against the wracking sobs (the overwhelming fears) still threatening to overtake him. As he does so he feels himself go quiet inside, calm, almost peaceful.

He wonders how he could ever have been swept away by the power of a hurricane when there was something so much stronger out there.

“No, baby. Not happening. You’re not going anywhere, okay?”

Billy huffs at that, but he obeys, stops trying to get away. *Neil was right, I’m such a fucking pussy.*

But Neil isn’t here, and Steve is talking now.

“I don’t know when this happened. I don’t know how or why. Just... just please stay with me, Billy, ‘kay? Stay with me? You with me, baby?”

Although he isn’t completely sure what Steve is talking about, Billy feels himself relaxing slightly into the body beneath him. He nods into his shoulder, rubbing his face against Steve's skin and the soft fabric of his pillow.

“Maybe...maybe we don’t need to have everything perfect and figured out.” Steve seems to be half talking to himself, thinking out loud, but Billy is listening anyway, hanging on every word.

“Listen to me. I’m okay. I feel okay with you. You understand? Not...I don’t feel ecstatic or miserable or like I’m dying. I feel okay.”

Fucking Shakespeare, Steve, really.

Billy grunts and shifts again and Steve tugs him back.

“Just *listen* to me, will you, before you go running? I never get to feel okay, okay? Not since...not since before the...the Demogorgon and the fire and...and everything. Even when I was trying to get back to normal and pretending like nothing had happened... I wasn’t just

okay. I wasn't *allowed* to be okay, right?"

Billy listens. He breathes in and out.

"Now if I'm happy or miserable or a maniac or scared or anything... it's okay. I'm okay being... whatever. You... you gave me that. You made me okay. All that time I was trying to be normal and YOU being a fucking NUTCASE was the thing that finally made me okay."

Steve tugs at Billy's long locks and suddenly Billy is reluctant, embarrassed to pull back and meet Steve's gaze. He does it anyway. He'd do anything Steve asked of him.

Steve looks very solemn and serious for someone who is red and sweating and stretched out on tangled bed-sheets with Billy's cock up his ass. He's the most beautiful, ridiculous thing Billy has ever seen, and he'd laugh now at the whole ludicrous situation if Steve himself didn't look and sound so sure of himself.

He'd laugh if Steve wasn't saying what he's saying.

"I'm not going to break, Billy. I'm not going to break. Not in any way I don't want to. Not as long as I'm with you."

"And neither are you, baby," Steve adds in a low tone, planting an aching tender kiss on the corner of Billy's mouth.

"Neither are you."

Billy kind of wants to cry again, but for a different reason. He doesn't, though, because there's something warm and furious growing in in the pit of his belly, something... kind of like a hurricane, but not scary or dangerous. Not too dangerous, anyway.

"And..." Steve's teeth tug at his lower lip, a shadow of uncertainty when Billy doesn't speak. Billy's eyes track the movement and he feels a deep corresponding ache, wants nothing more than to taste him, lips and tongue and teeth.

"And you need me too, right? You're here, right? Really here? You're not going to push me away or... or leave..."

"Never." The word is a growl, dragged up from the depths of some primal place within Billy.

If Billy had been more together, less raw in that moment, he might have tried for something more articulate, might have joked or teased or even tried to comfort. He might have been frightened or upset about showing his desire so openly, about revealing his feelings so quickly, about being so vulnerable.

He's the Keg King from Cali, after all, and Rule No. 1 is that you never admit that anything means anything to you.

But Billy isn't more together. The word comes out unbidden, almost cruel, terrible, unromantic. It's voiced by the animal inside him, fierce and wild and possessive and unshakable. It comes from the real Billy, the one who has never been able to be truly indifferent or unemotional... the one who very secretly *needs* with every fiber of his being.

"Never. Never."

That feeling inside... it's the low thrum of electricity, the humid heavy feeling just before a topical storm, that pulse of promise and *potential* just waiting for Billy to focus it, to shape it, to let it grow.

It's lightning. It's *fire*.

And Steve? Steve has apparently decided he's tired of the two of them always being stuck inside their own heads.

"Feels good, Billy..." Steve's eyes are locked onto Billy's, glazed with lust, and his voice is a low moan that goes straight to Billy's cock. Billy's breath stutters.

"You're so fucking beautiful I want to cry. I wanna touch you, taste you, every inch, all over... I wanna be good for you, I wanna be good, I wanna be all yours, yours to fuck... I've never wanted any of this so badly before, never even understood... please, please..."

His hands are tugging on Billy's hair and Billy makes a soft noise

between a groan and a purr.

“I’ve wanted you since I first saw you in the showers after basketball practice, with your fucking swagger and shoulders and *fire*. Didn’t even know what it meant, but I wanted you. All over me, inside me, owning me... Neugghhh...” Steve shifts his hips and licks his lips. Billy can’t look away.

“Billy... it feels so good. You inside me, licking me, touching me, feeling me... me touching you, smelling you... God, your body is so... your fucking amazing mouth, your shoulders, your fingers, your huge cock... Jesus...”

Steve’s lips are close now, next to his ear, whispering filth. “Splitting me open, so open for you... Billy...” Steve whines.

“Baby, I’m so wet... I’m fucking *leaking*, I feel like I’m gonna explode and I want it so bad it *hurts*. Feels so good, making me yours, taking me apart, ruining me, making me feel so fucking good... I want you, I want you... please, Billy, baby, please, please, please...”

Billy comes to, finally snaps, lets out an animal growl and pulls out. Without warning he throws himself down the bed, hikes up Steve’s hips, and buries his face in Steve’s ass, licking and sucking at his oversensitive hole.

Steve howls in surprise and pleasure, loud and shameless. “Yes, yes, yes,” he chants and pushes back, grabs his legs and rocks, his whole body lit up like a Christmas tree. “More, Billy, fuck...more!”

Mine.

Unafraid.

Billy goes at Steve’s rim like a starving man, opening Steve with his tongue, nipping with his teeth, sucking and tugging with lewd slurping sounds. He thrusts deeper than either of them ever thought possible, lets his teeth graze the sensitive, twitching ring of muscle, tastes lube and skin, tastes *Steve*.

Steve, who’s erection had softened with Billy’s initial push inward and with Billy’s sudden grief, is coming back to the edge again,

whining, moaning. His cock bounces against his belly and smears precum everywhere, and Billy, that cheater, doesn't stop rimming him as he pushes against his perineum, nuzzles at his balls. Steve is suddenly desperate, half-crazy from his own dirty talk and the intense heat of Billy's mouth, the talent of his tongue and his lips, those unpredictable brushes against vividly tender skin. He doesn't dare touch himself, can't do anything but chant Billy's name and different variations of *fuck* and *please*. He's in the danger zone almost embarrassingly fast, holding back from cumming right then and there through sheer force of will and his tenuous grip on the bed-sheets.

His hole flutters around Billy's tongue and Billy thrusts, uses his whole mouth. He slips a finger inside, then two, filling his boy, but not enough... it's a promise, pleasure. He curls them and hits Steve's prostate, and Steve lets out a filthy groan which nearly sends Billy over the edge.

He *wants* Steve to ache, he *wants* Steve to cry... in all the most deliciously desperate ways.

He needs them both to *feel* it, all the way down to their bones.

Once Billy is satisfied that they have gotten back to where he wants them, that he's erased all the shame, that all that's left between them is their shared agony and ecstasy, he draws away and urges Steve down.

"I want...I want..."

I need to see your face.

Billy and Steve crash their mouths together in a kiss, reveling in a taste that is purely *billyandsteve*.

They lock eyes and Billy pushes his cock into Steve's hole again in one long thrust, not gentle this time, not anything but desperate, needy, demanding, possessive. He feels himself nearly break inside with the sheer ecstasy of penetrating his lover's tight heat.

Steve's keening cry matches his own. "More, Billy... so good...not gonna break, I want it, want it, need it, please, please..."

Billy gives it to him, gives him everything, sheds his doubts and pours himself into Steve.

He feels exposed like a raw nerve and also alive and safe and *home* and his side is cramping up and Steve nearly kicks him in the face when Billy hikes his leg up to get a better angle but who cares and how is this possible and how is STEVE possible and who gives a fuck just more need give more need more more fuck...!

He can feel the moment when they both stop thinking, when the outside world and all the cruel, judgmental voices are blown away, when they give up and give over to each other and the overwhelming wave of feeling between them.

Steve wails as Billy hits his prostate again and again and Steve's reaching up and grabbing at Billy, tugging at his hair, rubbing his chest, teasing his nipples, scratching red lines down his back.

Billy wraps his hand around Steve's member and with two strokes Steve is cumming, his head thrown back and a wild scream of pleasure ripping out of him, emission splattering across both their chests. The sight alone is nearly enough to make Billy cream himself and with a few more thrusts in and out of Steve's clenching, oversensitive hole Billy follows, letting out a low guttural cry as he whites out.

When they both resurface the room around them feels almost preternaturally still, their panting magnified in the quiet. Billy shifts his body and finally, gently, pulls out of Steve. Steve lets out a low, filthy moan but doesn't seem to be in pain. Billy ducks his head down and checks as he pulls off the condom and sure enough – Steve's hole is puffy and red (*used. mine.*) but there is no tearing. He didn't hurt him.

It's okay.

"You okay, princess? Sore?" Billy asks, tying off the condom and rising to his knees, rubbing one of Steve's thighs soothingly. Steve, still blissed out, manages a wry snort.

“Stop fishing for compliments.”

“Yeah, don’t worry,” Billy says, dragging himself out of bed. “My ego is healthy enough, thanks.”

“Jackass.”

Billy, still naked, goes to the bathroom down the hall to get a glass of water. He drains the glass in several gulps, then refills it from the tap and brings it back to Steve, who is wiping his cum off his chest with a dirty shirt. He smiles at Billy when he enters (Billy is still kind of amazed at the novelty of someone being genuinely *happy* to see him come into a room), and shuffles over in the bed to make room for his lover.

“What are you thinking?” Billy asks as he puts the glass down on the nightstand.

Are we going to talk about this, about what happened, or...?

“I wish we...” Steve stops and frowns.

“What, baby?” Billy can’t help reaching out and running his fingers through Steve’s hair.

“Wish we didn’t need the condom...” Steve’s frown shifts into a wry, filthy little smirk. “Want you to come in me. Want to come in you, too.”

The sentiment is relatively tame, but coming from Steve’s mouth it’s enough to make Billy dizzy.

Billy is also absurdly grateful that they aren’t going to... that they don’t have to...

Maybe...maybe we don’t need to have everything perfect and figured out...

I love you, Steve Harrington, Billy thinks. Thank you for letting me shatter. Thank you for letting me not be perfect. Thank you for loving me enough to let me be fucked up.

He thinks this in a flash and then he lets it go.

"I've created a monster," he snorts as he climbs back under the covers, though his dick twitches valiantly at the mental image of his cum dripping out of Steve's hole. "It's overrated, though. Clean-up is hell."

Steve hums but seems unconvinced.

"We'll get tested if you want and then we can do it after."

"Pretty sure I'm clean, Bill."

"Sure babe, but you don't know where *I've* been."

He says it as a joke, but the thought is almost enough to send Billy down a darker path. He manages to steer himself away from it, from lost loves and old ghosts and father monsters.

"No, sweetheart," he shakes his head, shakes away the past. "Tests first." They've both heard about the gay cancer (so-called) and Billy is determined that this particular monster will never touch them.

How's that for respect and responsibility, pops?

"We're going to the city though, for the test. Not Hawkins. That's all we need... Doc-Whatever-The-Fuck with his hand up a sheep's ass telling the whole town about our sexual immorality."

"It's mostly cows around here," Steve says, mildly. "And it's a small town but the vet and doctor are in fact two separate people. Cousins, but still..."

Billy chuckles and leans back against the pillow, watching Steve, his mind whirling again.

"We can spend the night there. Drive up on a Friday, go to a real bar with good music. Sleep in the car."

"Um, we do that and we're getting a motel room, thanks..."

"C'mon man, it's a waste of good money."

“No... because you’re gonna want to take the Camaro, and there is NO FUCKING WAY we will both fit in that thing overnight. I don’t care how close...”

Steve does not get distracted by Billy’s lewd tongue wag. He does NOT...

“...ugh, how close we cuddle.”

“You’re just pissed because you almost lost your virginity to my gear shift last time we were making out in it.”

“I got a leg cramp! I can’t be sexy, AND on your lap, AND in your car at the same time! I’m good but I’m not that good. There’s no room to move in that front seat...!”

Billy opens his mouth to interject, but Steve cuts him off.

“...OR the backseat! Not to mention we almost shifted into neutral with that move and nearly drove into the quarry...”

Billy is shaking with laughter. “Such a spoiled fucking princess.”

“Damn straight. Fucking royalty and don’t you forget it! When we go on our fabulous road trip we’ll rent a motel room and then we’ll have a nice comfy bed. And you can then take His Majesty apart in style, in the manner to which I have become accustomed.”

When we go. Not *if*. Steve means it, and Billy believes him... they’ll go, they’ll get tested, they’ll spend the night together, it’s not just empty promises and pillow talk.

Billy will be 18 in three months. No more Neil, no more submitting to his twisted version of ‘respect’... Billy can move out. He can go to Indianapolis or California or New York... or he can stay right here in Hawkins.

He can drive to the city tomorrow with Steve and get tested, if they want. He’ll graduate. Steve will graduate. Max and Dustin and the rest will grow up.

The world is full of possibilities, now... and when he runs out of

options in this world there's another one underneath, beyond, waiting. There are monsters and dreams and mountains and oceans out there. And Billy gets to share it all with Steve.

The thought sends a pang of pure joy through Billy's pleasantly aching muscles.

"Hey, sweetheart," Billy nudges Steve, enjoying that other novelty – endearments (they've been trying them out, getting used to saying them *out loud*...Steve is more familiar with pet names, but Billy is still blown away by saying them and *meaning* them, honestly and without irony. He loves *saying* them and *hearing* them spoken, like they're an old married couple, like the words themselves are part of a poem, a prayer).

"Yes?"

"What do you want to be when you grow up, darling?" Billy is daydreaming of Steve in California, of his pretty boy stretched out on the sand.

Steve shakes his head but smiles and plays along. "I'm gonna be a monster-hunting babysitter. You? Baby?" he adds as an afterthought.

Maybe if he wasn't still riding a post-orgasm high he wouldn't have been brave enough to say it. Maybe it's something in the air, some electricity, or maybe it's Steve fucking Harrington's big brown eyes and the way his throat moves when he gulps down the water Billy had brought him.

"Yours," Billy says, perfectly serious.

Steve can see the seriousness in his eyes, the certainty. He twists around (to collect himself) to place the glass of water on the nightstand with a shaking hand and then turns back to Billy to confirm it. Once he does, once he sees, once he knows, he grabs onto Billy and kisses him, deeply, desperately, sure.

"Yes, sweetheart," he murmurs against Billy's lips, climbing into Billy's lap. Billy groans, melts into the kiss, wraps his arms tightly around his lover, swears silently to *never* let go.

“Yes, love,” Steve whispers again.

“Yes, baby.”

“Yes, darling.”

Yes.

Yes.

Notes for the Chapter:

That's all for this one, folks! You've been wonderful stardust readers, thank you so much for being awesome!